

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 24, 2009

Contact: Marni Goldberg

(202) 224-4843

****UPDATED****

Arkansas's Surgeon General, Arkansas Hospice, others weigh in

THE REVIEWS ARE IN:

Revised Senate Health Plan Will Help Arkansas's Seniors, Small Business Owners, Working Families, Hospitals

Arkansas groups agree – the final Senate version of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act provides hundreds of thousands of Arkansans with health insurance coverage, reduces health care costs for small businesses and extends the life of Medicare.

Arkansas's Surgeon General: For over 500,000 Arkansans that lack health insurance and the many more afraid of losing theirs, this action by the Senate moves us one step closer to securing their future.

"For over 500,000 Arkansans that lack health insurance and the many more afraid of losing theirs, this action by the Senate moves us one step closer to securing their future," **said Dr. Joe Thompson, Surgeon General for the state of Arkansas.** "It also starts us down the much needed path to prepare our healthcare system for the 21st Century."

Arkansas Hospice: We understand the Senate health care bill contains provisions that will preserve hospice care now and in the future.

"Arkansas Hospice is a non-partisan, not-for-profit, Medicare certified and state licensed hospice organization. We serve 375 patients daily in 31 counties in Arkansas.

"We understand the Senate Health Care bill in its current form as of December 22 contains provisions that will preserve hospice care now and in the future," **said Michael Aureli,**

President and CEO of Arkansas Hospice. “Two particular provisions come to mind: 1. The bill will reduce the Medicare cuts previously assigned to hospice. While the cuts currently projected will be difficult to manage, they will not be as devastating as the cuts originally scheduled. 2. The bill has a provision to fund hospice demonstration projects that, if successful, will enhance hospice care and reduce Medicare costs in the long run.

“We at Arkansas Hospice are grateful for these provisions and express our appreciation to Senators Lincoln and Pryor for supporting them.”

Little Rock Small Business Owner: *We thank Senator Lincoln for having the courage to step up and do something to solve this problem.*

“We really appreciate the efforts Sen. Lincoln has made on behalf of small businesses and self-employed people regarding health care reform,” **said a small business owner from Little Rock.** “She really understands how the current system is hurting entrepreneurs across Arkansas. We thank her for having the courage to step up do something to solve this problem.”

Hospital CEO: *On behalf of National Park Medical Center (in Hot Springs) and its 600 employees, I am writing today to thank you for your support of H.R. 3590, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.*

“My thanks for your leadership and the considerable effort you have put towards this issue,” **said Jerry D. Mabry, CEO of National Park Medical Center in Hot Springs.** “Many Arkansans will be able to lead healthier lives because of these efforts.”

AARP *strongly supports provisions in the Senate bill to strengthen long term services and supports, including provisions to improve access to Medicaid home and community based services, which can help keep millions of Americans out of nursing homes and in their own homes.*

“On behalf of nearly 375,000 AARP members in Arkansas, we thank Senator Lincoln for supporting the health care reform legislation put forward by the Senate,” **said Jerry Lancaster, AARP executive council member from Conway.** “It is an important milestone in our journey to health care reform.

“AARP strongly supports provisions in the Senate bill to strengthen long-term services and supports, including provisions to improve access to Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS), which can help keep millions of Americans out of nursing homes and in their own homes,” he added.

“We look forward to continuing our work with Senator Lincoln and others on both sides of the aisle to strengthen the bill, by further restricting age discriminatory practices and completely closing the doughnut hole in the Medicare prescription drug program. Fifty-six

percent of the Arkansans in Medicare Part D were 'at risk of falling into' the doughnut hole in 2009, and faced paying full price for their prescription drugs. AARP will continue to fight for reform that protects Medicare benefits, makes health care more affordable and improves the health of every American," Lancaster concluded.

***Arkansas small business owner:** We could do a lot better work, and do a whole lot more with the money we have if we weren't paying so much for health care.*

"We could do a lot better work, and do a whole lot more with the money we have if we weren't paying so much for health care. Leaving things the way they are just isn't acceptable," **said Bret Park, owner of Park Company Architects in Fayetteville whose firm employs three individuals full time.** "I am grateful to Senator Lincoln for her work on the Senate health care bill, and I'm happy it's moving forward. I'm hopeful that if reform is passed now, the change will be significant and it might open it up for further discussions down the road. No change would be just too demoralizing to bear."

***Arkansas Hospital Association** supports the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and encourages Senator Lincoln to vote in support of the bill.*

"The Arkansas Hospital Association supports the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and encourages Senator Lincoln to vote in support of this bill," **said Phil Matthews, AHA President and CEO.**

The bill will help the people of Arkansas as well as hospitals in our state. By expanding Medicaid and creating multi-state health insurance exchanges, this bill will allow approximately 400,000 uninsured Arkansans to obtain the medical coverage they need.

"As hospitals, our goal is to ensure universal coverage for health care services. Like Senator Lincoln, we believe that goal is achievable, and that this bill moves Arkansas and the nation closer to that goal."

***Health Economist and Native of Star City, Arkansas Len Nichols:** This bill is good for Arkansas and our country.*

"The Senate legislation as amended Tuesday morning makes insurance and quality health care accessible and affordable for all Americans, and thanks to the tireless efforts of Senator Blanche Lincoln, that includes rural Arkansans, too," **said Len Nichols, health economist and native of Star City.** "Specifically, the bill would encourage more doctors and nurses to practice primary care in rural areas, would lead doctors and hospitals to work together to keep patients healthier and at home rather than in the hospital when not necessary, would provide tax credits to small businesses so they can provide insurance to their workers, and would improve prescription drug coverage for seniors (like my brother and his wife in Hot Springs Village!). This bill is good for Arkansas and our country."

***Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families** applauds the Senate's work to progress*

health reform:

“Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families applauds the Senate's work to progress health reform,” **Rich Huddleston, Executive Director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families.** “This bill would be a major step forward for children and families, not only improving Arkansan’s health care, but also their pocketbooks.

“From the beginning of this debate, AACF advocated for a plan that ensures comprehensive, affordable and accessible health care for Arkansas’s low- and moderate-income children and their families without further burdening our nation’s budget. The Senate bill recognizes the important role of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in protecting the physical and financial health of millions of children and families. The Senate bill also provides health coverage and assistance to over 490,000** Arkansans through Medicaid or subsidies to make health insurance more affordable for working families. And finally, the Senate bill provides reform that will be fully paid for and will actually reduce our nation’s deficit. We are grateful that our senators worked to ensure that these issues had a voice and that these values are reflected in health reform legislation.

“While no bill is perfect, both the House and Senate bills have many good things for family and state budgets. We thank Senator Lincoln for her efforts to date to help craft a bill that improves health care for Arkansas families. We know that she will continue to work for the best bill possible after the legislation passes the Senate and the two chambers negotiate a final bill. Without this bill, the current system will push families, small business and state budgets further into debt. We cannot afford the status quo any longer.”

**AACF used data from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, from the Annual Social and Economic Characteristics supplements to the 2007, 2008 and 2009 Current Population Surveys

Arkansas Small Business Owner: *I am grateful to Senator Lincoln and everyone who voted with her to support this bill:*

“I’m grateful to Senator Lincoln and everyone who voted with her to support this bill,” **said Lisa Sharp, owner of Nightbird Books in Fayetteville which employs four people part-time.** “I hope this is a step toward passing a final bill that will ensure health insurance becomes and stays affordable for small business owners.”

Hospital CEO: *On behalf of Saint Mary’s Regional Medical Center and its 700 employees; I am writing today to thank you for your support of H.R. 3590, the “Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.”*

“I am particularly pleased that H.R. 3590 would increase access to affordable, quality coverage; create a market-based exchange with a network of entities offering insurance that would negotiate rates with providers; and implement sensible delivery reforms such as value-based purchasing, a prospective plan on self-referral to physician-owned hospitals, and voluntary pilots to test bundled payments across an episode of care – to name a few,” said

Mike McCoy, CEO of Saint Mary's Regional Medical Center in Russellville, Arkansas.

Former Mayor of Little Rock Lottie Shackelford: *"We need the reforms this bill brings."*

"Arkansas's families and businesses would benefit tremendously under the Senate's plan for health reform by having access to quality and affordable health care," said Lottie Shackelford, a widely respected leader in Arkansas and former mayor of Little Rock. "We need the reforms this bill brings. This would not be possible without Senator Lincoln's efforts, and I thank her for her commitment to moving our state forward."

"Thank You Senator Lincoln"

"I have a daughter with Down syndrome and I'm self employed. I can't get her health insurance, so I think health care reform will help us," **said Nancy Shaw of Hot Springs.** "[Lincoln's vote] really says she's paying attention to the people that voted for her. The fact that she voted for it really says it does matter."

"Senator Lincoln stood up for Arkansans with her vote to advance the Senate's health reform bill. I applaud her, Senator Pryor and all 60 elected officials who saw that the status quo needs changing," **said Dr. Hershey Garner of Fayetteville.** "While I support the goals of the bill -- which will insure millions, mean more doctors can serve communities in need, community health centers will be prioritized and the patient-doctor relationship will improve through coordinated care measures -- there is more to be done. The perfect should not be the enemy of the good -- especially when the 'good' is improved access to health care in my hometown. I will celebrate the day that Congress sends a bill to the President, but will continue to fight for more improvements to our broken health care system because this hard fought victory is only one battle in a larger war,"

"I appreciate [Senator Lincoln's] vote, especially because it was a difficult balancing act in a conservative state. It's going to help a lot of Arkansans," **said Small Business Owner Jim Bins of Fayetteville,** who owns Earthworks Landscape Gardening, Inc.

"Please thank Senator Lincoln for her recent votes in support of health care reform," **said Earl and Suzanne Babbie of Hot Springs Village.** "We know this has been a difficult time for her though we can't imagine HOW difficult. Although compromises are always frustrating, this is an important beginning toward rectifying one of America's critical problems. Ultimately, both Arkansas and the nation will benefit from Senator Lincoln's leadership, and we look forward to seeing her in the U. S. Senate for many more years."

"A hearty thank you to Senator Lincoln for her good vote on the health care reform bill. I appreciate all of her input and effort to make this bill better for Arkansas," **said Ben Thielemier of Little Rock.**

"Thanks to Sen. Lincoln for her courageous vote in favor of healthcare reform. Her acts will save lives in Arkansas as well as jobs, families and lessen stress and chronic healthcare deficits. I have been watching carefully and just want to say thank you," **said Jerry Rephan of Hot Springs.**

“I’m glad she didn’t rush to judgment, that she gave thought to the issue and really did consider what the outcome was going to be. I’m not retirement age yet, but it’s before me, and I feel a little worried and I’m glad somebody is looking out for me,” **said Karron Hocut from North Little Rock.** “The big expense we have is prescription drugs and we really need to find a way to manage that, so I’m glad Senator Lincoln voted the way she did. I know this has been a stressful issue for her.”

“It’s good for the country. I am personally on Medicare, and I think health care reform is not only good for the people of Arkansas, so many of whom don’t have insurance, but it’s good for the American people, especially during these hard times. I think it’s wonderful that our congressmen and senators have worked together to pass this bill,” **said Patricia Gee of Little Rock.** “It will help my family personally as well as everybody who has insurance and is struggling to pay premiums with higher costs. It will help everybody. I called yesterday to tell Senator Lincoln thank you. I appreciate so much that she stood up for us.”

“When you’re not even allowed to shop around, you have to take what is there,” **said Owen McMullen of Little Rock, a retired member of the military.** “I’m glad health care reform will open up the marketplace and allow consumers to shop around and compare plans. That creates competition and we desperately need to open up the marketplace.”

“What I really like about the bill is that it expands Medicaid and expands community health centers,” **said Shanna Stroup of Texarkana.** “Getting rid of pre-existing conditions is also a good idea. Health care reform is definitely worth the effort to get more people insured. It’s a great first step ... I’m glad Senator Lincoln was there with her party.”

“We’ve got to have health care reform, and I think we really need to get this done because Republicans are telling lies,” **said Barbara Satterfield of Little Rock.** “Too many people are uninsured, the insurance and drug companies are making too much money, and it’s time that we get costs under control and expand coverage... We have good health care in the United States but we can definitely do better. Just about everybody I talk to says we need to do something about health care, and I’m glad Senator Lincoln voted in favor of it.”

“I was lucky because I had insurance to fall back on, but I know others who weren’t so lucky and need care even more. Thank you for standing up for regular Arkansans,” **said David Turner of Little Rock.**